

VZCZCXRO3926
RR RUEHBZ RUEHDU RUEHJO RUEHMR RUEHRN
DE RUEHLG #0254/01 1231016
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 021016Z MAY 08
FM AMEMBASSY LILONGWE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5225
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LILONGWE 000254

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DEPT FOR AF/S - S. HILL, E. PELLETREAU

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [ZI](#) [MI](#)

SUBJECT: MALAWI: CIVIL SOCIETY WANTS STRONGER STAND ON ZIMBABWE

REF: LILONGWE 234

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The government of Malawi has been relatively quiet on Zimbabwe since it released an April 19 statement calling for the release of election results. While low-level Ministry of Foreign Affairs contacts continue to suggest that Malawi is quietly working through SADC to resolve the situation, publicly relations between the two nations remain normal. Opposition political parties, most notably former president Muluzi, have become more vocal in their call for an end to the delay. Muluzi has warned the Malawi Electoral Commission to avoid a duplication of the Zimbabwe scenario in 2009. Civil society leaders also continue to speak out and call for stronger GOM condemnation of the violence and a stand against a recount without release of the initial results. End Summary.

Government of Malawi Returns to Silence

¶2. (U) Since releasing a statement on April 19 calling for election results to be released (reftel), the government of Malawi has not added any further public pressure for a resolution. Deputy Minister of Information John Bande told the press that the government was being prudently cautious in taking a stand on Zimbabwe and would let diplomatic principles guide the GOM's interactions. Pro-government Zimbabwean newspapers quoted Dr. Benson Tembo, Malawi's Ambassador to Zimbabwe, at the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair saying relations between the two countries remain excellent and that Malawi would remain actively involved in the SADC-supported dialogue between the political parties in Zimbabwe. Tembo reiterated that Malawi favored a policy of non-interference and hoped that Zimbabwe would solve its own problems.

¶3. (SBU) Contacts at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs continue to contend that Malawi is actually quietly pressing for a quick release of the election results. In a conversation earlier this week, the Foreign Minister told the Ambassador that Malawi continues to support President Mbeki's efforts, citing the results of the parliamentary seats recount as a vindication of Mbeki's approach. She hoped that the "verification" of the Presidential votes would have a similar outcome, or at least that it would enable Zimbabwe to move ahead to the next step, that of a second round. She seemed irritated at calls for more vigorous SADC action, saying that SADC had entrusted Mbeki with the task and he should be allowed to proceed. The Ambassador noted the reports of the campaign of intimidation and violence now under way in Zimbabwe; the Minister seemed unaware or unwilling to acknowledge it, though she was intensely interested. Lower level MFA contacts confided that they applauded the refusal of SADC countries to allow the Chinese ship to dock and unload weapons bound for Zimbabwe and they felt the delay of

Zimbabwean election results had now reached ridiculousness.

Opposition Political Parties More Vocal

¶4. (U) On April 23, Kamuzu Chibambo, president of People's Transformation Party (PETRA), a small Malawian opposition party, publicly called the situation in Zimbabwe a state of emergency and bemoaned the lack of action by SADC now that the situation in Zimbabwe had become violent. Chibambo continued that the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) was under siege and that the High Court of Zimbabwe has been intimidated into inaction. He further stated that if SADC backs down from Mugabe's challenge then it will give him free reign to decide the outcome of the election.

¶5. (U) During the United Democratic Front (UDF) convention on April 24, former president Bakili Muluzi condemned the actions of the ZEC and called for the immediate release of election results in Zimbabwe. Muluzi warned the Malawi Electoral Commission from duplicating the scenario and called for free and fair elections in Malawi in 2009. Muluzi also encouraged greater international community help to solve the Zimbabwe crisis.

Civil Society Critical of GOM's Soft Stand

¶6. (U) Center for Human Rights and Rehabilitation (CHRR) Executive Director Undule Mwakasungula has led the civil society outcry for the release of the election results and a firmer GOM stance on Zimbabwe. Mwakasungula, along with Malawi Human Rights Resource Center (MHRCC) Executive Director Desmond Kaunda, represented Malawi in Dar-es-Salaam

LILONGWE 00000254 002 OF 002

at the April 21 African Emergency Summit on Zimbabwe. Upon his return, Mwakasungula called for an African-led response to Zimbabwe and expressed disappointment over the GOM's lack of condemnation of the violence, intimidation, and harassment by ZANU-PF. He also asked the GOM to take a stand on the vote recount ordered by President Mugabe.

¶7. (SBU) Kaunda, commenting on the outcomes of the Dar conference, said any results from a recount should not be recognized and that state violence must be condemned. Kaunda also said that SADC mediation had failed and that a new leader should be tasked with continuing the mediation. Kaunda said conference delegates recommended that the MDC should stop demanding the release of results and instead act as a government in waiting.

Zimbabwe Issue an Eye-Opener For Malawi

¶8. (SBU) With elections in Malawi only a year away, parties with an interest in those elections, especially in unseating the current government, have vocally objected to the Zimbabwe crisis and asked for increased GOM action. Mwakasungula has been one of the most outspoken critics of the Mutharika government's refusal to compromise with opposition and the lack of constitutionally-mandated local government elections. His outcries on Zimbabwe, much like Muluzi's more direct comments, are also meant as a warning to the people of Malawi regarding 2009. Malawian media, for its part maintains nearly daily press coverage of events in Zimbabwe but usually runs Reuters or BBC stories without adding additional commentary. While Malawian civil society continues to condemn violence in Zimbabwe, comments coming from the Dar-es-Salaam conference suggest there will be little stomach for an outside military solution even if the situation continues to deteriorate.

CLOSING THE INFORMATION GAP

¶9. (SBU) Our public affairs office is, as of May 1, producing a daily press compilation on Zimbabwe, which we intend to share with the Foreign Minister and other senior officials, as local press coverage of events in Zimbabwe is limited and often pulls its punches. We believe Malawi will follow the lead of other SADC countries, particularly South Africa, on Zimbabwe, but providing more information to senior officials will enable them to form their own opinions rather than relying on spotty local media or what the Zimbabwe High Commission tells them.

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